

Message Text

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51

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 AID-20 EB-11 AGR-20 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14

DPW-01 DRC-01 /179 W

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R 161223Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8327

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17945

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER SANYA'S "MEET THE PEOPLE" TELEGRAM PROGRAMS

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER SANYA HAS INITIATED A SERIES OF INFORMAL TELEVISION CONVSERSATIONS WITH HIS CABINET AND PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICIALS TO INFORM THE PUBLIC ABOUT GOVERNMENT POLICY AND BRING GOVERNMENT LEADERS CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE. THE FIRST TWO PROGRAMS CONCENTRATED ON THE RICE PROBLEM AND THE MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER. THE PROGRAMS ARE POPULAR, BUT SANYA SOMETIMES GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF NOT HAVING A COMPLETE GRASP OF HIS GOVERNMENT MACHINERY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED A NOVEL TECHNIQUE TO INFORM
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THE PUBLIC OF ITS POLICIES AND PROBLEMS. PRIME MINISTER

SANYA THAMMASAK HAS NOW HELD TWO "MEET THE PEOPLE" PROGRAMS ON PRIME TIME TELEVISION, AND HE PROMISES THAT THESE PROGRAMS WILL CONTINUE AT REGULAR INTERVALS EVERY OTHER WEEK. THE FORMAT IS AN INFORMAL DISCUSSION IN WHICH SANYA, AS MODERATOR, ASKS A FEW KEY OFFICIALS ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITIES, POLICIES, AND PROBLEMS OF THEIR MINISTRY OR DEPARTMENT. EACH PROGRAM CONCENTRATES ON A SINGLE SUBJECT, AND FEATURES THOSE CABINET AND PUBLIC SECURITY OFFICIALS MOST CLOSELY CONCERNED WITH THAT SUBJECT.

2. THE FIRST PROGRAM ON NOVEMBER 2 CONCENTRATED ON THE RICE PROBLEM. COMMERCE MINISTER CHARNCHAI LEETHAVORN, AGRICULTURAL MINISTER PRINCE CHAKKAPHAN PENSIRI CHAKKAPHAN, AND DEPUTY COMMERCE MINISTER CHARUN SIBUNRUANG ASSURED THE PUBLIC THAT SUFFICIENT RICE STOCKS EXIST TO FEED THE BANGKOK METROPOLITAN AREA FOR THE NEXT THREE MONTHS, AND THAT THIS YEAR'S RICE CROP WOULD BE ABOUT TWO MILLION TONS HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR'S. THEY SAID THAT BETTER COORDINATION BETWEEN THEIR MINISTRIES WOULD LOWER THE HIGH RICE PRICES WHICH THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT'S MISHANDLING HAD CAUSED.

3. IN THE SECOND PROGRAM ON NOVEMBER 14, SANYA DISCUSSED PUBLIC PEACE AND ORDER WITH INTERIOR MINISTER KAMOL WANNAPRAPA, ARMY COMMANDER GEN. KRIT SIVARA, AND POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL PRACHUAB SUNTHARANGKUL. SANYA ASKED FOR PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S NEED FOR LAW AND ORDER IN ORDER TO CONDUCT ITS BUSINESS. KAMOL DISCUSSED THE INTERIOR MINISTRY'S PREPARATIONS FOR AN ELECTORAL LAW AND POLITICAL PARTY LAW. BUT THE MOST DRAMATIC STATEMENTS OF THE EVENING WERE PUBLIC VOWS BY KRIT AND PRACHUAB THAT THE ARMY AND POLICE WILL HENCEFORTH STAY OUT OF POLITICS. KRIT SAID SOLDIERS WOULD BE THE "TOOLS OF THE GOVERNMENT" NO MATTER WHO THE PRIME MINISTER AND DEFENSE MINISTER MIGHT BE.

4. COMMENT. THERE HAS BEEN SOME CRITICISM OF SANYA'S ROLE AS MODERATOR OF THE PROGRAMS. BY HUMBLY QUESTIONING HIS SUBORDINATES ABOUT THE POLICIES OF THEIR MINISTRIES, HE GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT HE DOES NOT CONTROL THE

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INDIVIDUAL MINISTRIES AND IS EVEN UNINFORMED ABOUT THEIR ACTIVITIES. THIS WAS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF THE SECOND PROGRAM. DESPITE THEIR VOWS TO STAY OUT OF POLITICS, KRIT AND PRACHUAB GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE IN COMPLETE CHARGE OF THEIR RESPECTIVE SERVICES, AND WILL REMAIN IN CHARGE AFTER THE INTERIM SANYA GOVERNMENT HAS COMPLETED ITS CHORES. ALTHOUGH THE PUBLIC WAS HAPPY TO HEAR THAT THE ARMY AND POLICE WILL STAY NEUTRAL DURING THE

COMING ELECTIONS, THE BELIEF PERSISTS THAT AT THE VERY LEAST THEY WILL REMAIN POWERFUL PRESSURE GROUPS IN THAI POLITICS.

5. THE "MEET THE PEOPLE" PROGRAMS ARE NEVERTHELESS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD OF REDUCING THE GAP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC. THE INFORMAL, FOLKSY WAY SANYA AND HIS MINISTERS COMMUNICATE WITH THE PEOPLE CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS. THE PROGRAMS HAVE PROVEN POPULAR AND HAVE WON PRAISE FROM THE THAI PRESS.

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